



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History
Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Paul Duncan Film Collection

NMAH.AC.0827

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Paul Duncan Film Collection
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0827
Date:	1937-1941
Extent:	0.5 Cubic feet
Creator:	Duncan, James T. Duncan, Paul
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated to the Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian by James T. Duncan, son of Paul J. Duncan, in November 2002.

Related Materials

Materials in the Archives Center

The Robinson-Via Family Papers, 1845-2000 (AC0475)

The William C. Kost Farm Records, 1939-1989 (AC0481)

Processing Information

processed by Franklin A. Robinson, Jr., January 2005

Preferred Citation

Paul Duncan Film Collection, 1937-1941, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

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Biographical / Historical

Between 1937 and 1941, amateur film maker, Paul Jasper Duncan (1899-1986), documented non-mechanized farming practices in the eastern Pennsylvania region where he had grown up. Duncan was born in Meadville, Pennsylvania on March 21, 1899. He was the son of Raymond and Nellie Thayer Duncan. Duncan's maternal grandfather, Charles F. Thayer (1848-1933), lived in nearby Atlantic next to the W. Clark McMillen farm. In 1901, Myrna K. Thayer, one of Duncan's maternal aunts, married W. Clark McMillen. Clark McMillen was a full-time farmer. About 1918, Raymond Duncan and his family moved to Atlantic and lived in the Thayer home next door to the McMillen farm. During his youth, Duncan worked on the McMillen farm when labor was needed and when he needed to earn some money but he never had any interest in becoming a farmer. Duncan graduated from Meadville High School in 1919.

Duncan attended Pennsylvania State University for a year studying mechanical engineering. He returned to Meadville taking a job as a teacher for manual training (shop, woodworking, etc.). He married Alice Driver but within a month she died of "milk fever". Duncan returned to Penn State completing one more year toward a degree before moving to Chicago in the fall of 1922. He married Gertrude Glover in 1924 and in the fall of 1938 they moved to Des Plaines, Illinois. They had two children: Margaret (b. 1929) and James (b. 1932). Duncan worked as a mechanical design engineer for the Universal Oil Company and the Ludlow Typograph Company.

In 1937, Duncan purchased an 8mm movie camera. He had an interest in still photography and this interest extended to motion pictures. During summer family trips to Atlantic in 1937, 1939 and 1941 Duncan documented three farming practices on the McMillen farm: making hay (1937), threshing wheat (1941), and cradling and flailing (1941). During this time the farm was being worked by McMillen and his son-in-law Roy Ferrin (d. 1945). With the exception of cradling and flailing, the farm work was not staged and coincided with the Duncan family visits to Atlantic. At the time that Duncan filmed cradling and flailing the wheat had been cut, so McMillen is seen cutting and binding sheaves of oats instead. In addition to McMillen, Ferrin and Duncan's nephew Neil Duncan are seen in the films.

After retiring from the Ludlow Typographic Company in 1968, Duncan and his wife moved to Dos Cabezas, Cochise County, Arizona. He died in 1986.

Scope and Contents

Filmed entirely on location at the W. Clark McMillen Farm in Atlantic, Pennsylvania, the Paul Duncan Film Collection documents three types of now obsolete farming practices using draft horses and manual labor: making hay (1937), threshing wheat (1939), and cradling & flailing (1941). The film is 8mm, black and white and color. Edge codes date from 1926, 1932, and 1934-35.

Arrangement

Collection arranged into one series.

Abbreviations

OF = Original Film

RV = Reference Video

MV = Master Video

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Agricultural machinery
- Agriculture -- Pennsylvania
- Draft horses
- Farm equipment
- Farmers
- Harvesting -- Pennsylvania

Types of Materials:

- Motion pictures (visual works) -- 1930-1950

Names:

- McMillen, Clark

Container Listing

Box 1, Item OF
827.01;

Box 1, Item MV
827.01;

Box 1, Item RV
827.01

Harvesting on the McMillen Farm, 1937-1941

400f, 8mm, b&w, color, silent, camera original reversal; a compilation reel of amateur shot film detailing farming practices using draft horses and manual labor on the McMillen farm in Atlantic, Pennsylvania:

1. Making hay, 1937, Neil Duncan appears briefly
2. Threshing Wheat, 1939
3. Cradling and Flailing, 1941, W. Clark McMillen

Camera Operator: Paul J. Duncan

Persons Pictured: Roy Ferrin, James and Margaret Duncan, Neil Duncan, W. Clark McMillen